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ABSTRACT

Librarians have advanced degrees in the library field, not in the field of management. But the higher one goes in the institutional hierarchy, the more time must be spent in managing. Librarians must take the management process seriously and understand what good managing is. Managers are constantly appraising their staff and being appraised by them. Performance standards, or Management by Objective (MBO) provides a system for such appraisal. Objectives for the manager or staff member should be established on a one to one basis between the supervisor and the individual, but it is useful if the entire staff first decides on departmental objectives. Individual objectives should be made meaningful, measurable and flexible, for the growth of the staff member rather than as punishment. At the Columbia University Libraries, task forces of all levels of personnel are working on the establishment of objectives. This has opened up new lines of communication, but is also shifting the traditional bureaucratic structures and loyalties at an accelerating rate. Organizational redesign is thus becoming a continuing function. The experience of articulating performance objectives has proved difficult, but worthwhile. (SL)

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AMERICAN LIBRARY ASSOCIATION

STAFF DEVELOPMENT WORKSHOP

July 7, 1974

PERFORMANCE STANDARDS FOR LIBRARIANS: ARE THEY COMING OR NOT?

Library Personnel and Performance Standards

Joyce D. Veenstra

We have already heard how a large industry, namely IBM, uses performance standards for their personnel as part of their philosophy of management. But sometimes we are prone to "turn off" when we hear a business man saying something, and we say to ourselves, "Oh well, this isn't for us because we're librarians, not business people." Speaking as a librarian, I have been in this field for some time with varied library experience in school, public and academic libraries, and presently I am a first line supervisor in a large academic library. I would like to talk with you about these same performance standards and their use in library management.

We've come a long way in our library management techniques since the time of the benevolent authoritative library director. Today when we're talking about staff development and performance standards for librarians, we're talking about a whole new language. We've had an explanation of what performance standards are and how they can be used, and information on effectiveness and cost studies. Now we're down to what it's really all about - PEOPLE - LIBRARIANS!

Dr. Rensis Likert, the well known management expert says, "Every aspect of an organization's activities is determined by the competence, motivation and general effectiveness of its human organization. Of all the tasks of management, managing the human component is the central and most important task, because all else depends upon how well it is done".[1]

Management by Objectives is nothing new, and when we talk about Performance Standards, we're talking about Management by Objectives - MBO. "Management by Objectives is really NOT a technique; it's a philosophy"[2] and in order to implement MBO, our managers must believe that the management responsibility they have is as important as, and different from the professional library job. The managers must realize the importance of managing. Dr. De Prospo spoke on MBO in 1971 at the ALA - Staff Development Committee Workshop, just like this one, but libraries, as a whole, still do not seem to be "tuned in".

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1. Likert, Rensis. The Human Organization; Its Management and Value. New York, McGraw Hill, 1967. p. 1.
2. Schrieber, David and Stanley Sloan. "Management by Objectives". Personnel Administrator, 15:22, May-June 1970.

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One of the problems is - we have advanced degrees in the library field, not in the managing field. We went to library school because we loved books, and we wanted to get books and people together. We did not get an MBA, or study business methods. But - what happens? We do a superb job as a reference librarian or cataloger, or bibliographer, etc., and an opening occurs as head of the department. We move into the position, still being superb reference librarians, or catalogers, or bibliographers, not fully aware of the new opportunities and challenges that have been given to us as managers that require different but as specialized knowledge, talent and techniques. The higher you go in the organizational hierarchy, particularly in a medium size or large library, the more time must be spent managing and less time in the technical area. THIS IS FACT, and if this is not happening in your organization, and managers are devoting too much time to the technical side of the work in their department, and not enough time to managing, it shows!

We must take managing seriously. We must understand what good managing is. It is basically "getting things DONE THROUGH OTHER PEOPLE".[3] This does not mean that the manager sits with feet on his desk, hands behind his head and lets everyone else do the work. Once you become a manager, the total communion with books tends to go by the wayside, and you must now learn to "commune" with people. Hopefully, public service librarians at least, already have this ability. But communication with staff goes to greater depths than communication with the public. Communication is not one way - but rather an interchange on what the staff expects from you as well as what you expect from the staff.

As we get things done through other people, we are evaluating these other people, but does the staff member know how he is being judged? - on what basis? Or is it just - "You did a fine job cataloging that last batch of books, Betsy". That's nice, but it doesn't necessarily tell the cataloger why the manager thought it was a fine job. Good typing? Descriptive cataloging especially accurate and concise? More books completed than he expected? So the cataloger doesn't really know what she has done correctly or incorrectly in order to do a better job on the next batch of books.

As managers we are constantly appraising and being appraised - not in writing, necessarily - but daily we are reacting and evaluating. Thus, as staff members or as managers, we do not have a choice as to whether we are being appraised or not. It's happening - every time there is a salary review or an opportunity for promotion, we're appraised - as well as daily. Sometimes an individual doesn't really know what his supervisor things of him until he's fired. What a terrible time to find out! So the question is not whether there should be an appraisal, but the method of appraisal.

This is where performance standards or objectives enter the picture. There is some difficulty with the word - STANDARDS - as it has a connotation in some minds of rigidity. We certainly don't want that - we want flexibility so the staff member can grow - and ultimately, therefore, the organization

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3. American Management Association. How to Improve Individual Manager Performance. Educational package including films, case studies, programmed instruction, etc.

benefits - and objectives can be reached better. Mr. Connor has already indicated that IBM prefers the term "Performance Objectives". I will use performance standards and performance objectives interchangeably in this talk.

What does it take to implement MBO? Two management experts say, "If department heads are truly given responsibility for decision making and forced to make meaningful decisions - (to which I might add - for which they are held responsible) - then MBO is easily introduced. If department heads have no experience in delegation and decision making, introducing MBO becomes much more difficult".[4] Are we allowed to make decisions as managers that affect our department? Do we allow our managers to make decisions? OR Are we forced to use - or do we depend on or demand use of the hierarchical structure? As Peter Drucker says in his latest book, which I understand you were all asked to tackle, "What matters is managerial autonomy AND accountability".[5] Give managers maximum authority and full responsibility for results! This may happen at the top level, but often does not happen further down the chain of command.

In the implementation of MBO, the knowledge, attitudes, and skills of the managers themselves play a very important role, as does the climate for and incidence of change in the organization, as well as the role of the chief librarian and his attitudes.[6] Schrieber and Sloan say that MBO can be implemented on a partial basis rather than for the total organization. Partial implementation in departments where the manager is enthusiastic and does a good job can influence other departments to give it a try.[7]

Objectives for the individual manager or staff member should be established on a one to one basis between the supervisor and the individual - BUT - it can be useful, particularly when just beginning MBO, for managers who manage people doing like tasks, to sit down with their department to discuss objectives for the Department before establishing objectives for individuals. Departmental objectives most likely exist in some form, but they may not have been re-examined for some time - or they may have been established by the department head without any in-put at all by the staff or any understanding by the staff.

When discussing performance objectives on a one to one basis, you should attempt to make the objectives meaningful and measurable, and for the purpose of development of the individual, not punishment!

"All levels of staff fear performance measures which are used in a punitive manner by their superiors. Measurements that can be applied by the individual to his own performance and that can help guide group decisions and actions are the most acceptable and useful both to the individual and to the library."[8]

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4. Schrieber, op. cit. p. 22.
5. Drucker, Peter G. Management: Tasks, Responsibilities, Practices. New York, Harper & Row, 1974. p. 154.
6. Schrieber, op. cit. p. 20
7. Ibid. p. 24.
8. "Guidelines to the Development of Human Resources in Libraries: Rationale, Policies, Programs, and Recommendations." Library Trends, July, 1971, p.104 (paraphrased from Likert)

The establishment of mutual objectives between the supervisor and the employee allows the individual to measure his own performance. The individual and the supervisor are now measuring results: measuring the work, more than the worker.

Sometimes a staff member has measurements, especially quantitative, for herself, which are not totally realistic in terms of being too high or too low. It's up to the supervisor to point out that the objective should be high but also realistic, and maybe the resolution is to expand the target date for a too high objective. I have a staff member in my department, Cataloging with Copy, who is not a librarian, but is a highly qualified technical member of the staff. She has set a quantitative standard for herself on a monthly basis which is too high. What happens is that some months she wears herself to a frazzle trying to meet her own standards. We are trying to help her to become more realistic in her expectations of herself, using a broader base of time, because she becomes bitter as well as tired in the months where she doesn't meet her own standard.

The objective should be flexible, not rigid. Don't allow the fact that you are now stating objectives to fix them in granite, unchangeable, especially when beginning MBO. That is not the point. They are established to serve as measurable guidelines for the individual. Objectives need not be quantitative and often cannot be - but when it is possible to quantify something, it can be helpful. It should be mutually established, however. If the head of a cataloging department has a certain figure in his head as to the number of titles an individual should catalog in a given period of time, he should discuss this with the individual, so they can come to an agreement on the figure.

The setting of objectives is much more useful when there is an appraisal process. And in the same manner, the appraisal process is much more productive in terms of development of staff where there are objectives and key results to appraise, so the two processes are rather interdependent. With mutual objective setting between manager and employee, there should be no surprises in the formal appraisal process.

Mr. Drucker has four chapters in his book devoted to Service institutions - that's us! I'd like to read a few paragraphs to you from that section:

"What the service institution needs is not to be more business-like. They need to be subjected to performance tests as much as possible. They need to think through their own specific functions, purposes and missions. What the service institution needs is not better people. They need people who do the management job systematically and who focus themselves and their institution purposefully on performance and results. They do need efficiency, that is, control of costs, but above all they need effectiveness, that is, emphasis on the right results.

Few service institutions today suffer from having too few administrators; most of them are overadministered, and suffer from a surplus of procedures, organization charts and management techniques. What now has to be learned is to manage service institutions for performance. THIS MAY WELL BE THE BIGGEST AND MOST IMPORTANT MANAGEMENT TASK IN THIS CENTURY!"[9]

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9. Drucker, op. cit. p. 166.

What a dynamite statement! What a challenge to us in the libraries! But I hear you saying to yourselves - Boy - is she an idealist. You bet your life I am. Striving for ideals and goals is what it's all about - and what better place to do it than in the library!!!

Now let's look at a real library situation:

My real library is Columbia University Libraries. As many of you know, Columbia Libraries was the subject of a case study in 1971 to examine the organization and staffing of a large research library. The study was conducted by the management consultant firm of Booz, Allen and Hamilton and the Office of University Library Management Studies of ARL. There was broad participation on the part of the professional staff during the study, and in examining, evaluating and helping to implement the recommendations. There were ten pages in the looseleaf version of the study on Staff Development, so it did form an important part of the study.

Shortly after the completion of the study, the University Librarian appointed the two advisory committees recommended by the study. One of these was the Staff Development Committee, a five member committee, with the Personnel Director as ex-officio member, whose responsibilities as stated in the study were as follows:

1. To review and recommend adoption of staff development plans.
2. To review performance of individual professional staff members on a periodic scheduled basis.
3. To recommend steps to advance professional development.

The committee modified and expanded these responsibilities somewhat, but they covered these areas of development of ALL levels of staff and advancement of professional staff members.

In conjunction with what we're talking about today, the committee, after much work on its own, asked for the help of an expert in form design (and I would recommend this) in order to design a new appraisal form for use with the professional staff. It includes the procedure of a discussion between the supervisor and the employee being appraised regarding how well the employee has fulfilled his responsibilities. After the discussion, the employee reads the appraisal and signs it. We originally had determined to file this completed form in the individual's folder in the Personnel Office, but through discussion and examination of what our real goals are, we have determined not to file it in personnel, but rather to use it as a definite step in the development of the individual in terms of establishing individual performance objectives between the supervisor and the employee. The forms will be kept by the people involved, the supervisor and the employee, and can be discarded when objectives are completed or a new developmental appraisal takes place.

At the end of the management study at Columbia, the library administration felt that one of the top priorities was to help our managers to become better managers. So the library and two other departments in the university purchased a package from the American Management Association entitled "How to Improve Individual Manager Performance". This two day seminar which includes films, case studies, programmed instruction, role plays, leader's manual and book of readings, was given to every manager in the library in groups of ten to twelve

The course basically presents MBO. It is designed for businesses, but we found that the abstract ideas and philosophy applied just as well to the library situation. The most important part of the whole seminar was the discussion. By guiding the discussion to apply the ideas in the films to library problems, the material was found to be useful. Even though it is not specifically geared to libraries, it has been one of the chief motivations behind the development of the philosophy of management in the library.

Some of the participants felt that the establishment of performance standards, as they are called in this AMA seminar, might be possible and certainly worth a try in the libraries. Others felt it couldn't be done. Our Staff Development Committee thought it would be useful to try to establish some general standards of performance for catalogers, reference librarians, bibliographers, etc., and we attempted it. But we were working in a vacuum and not following the proper procedures. Because other things were more pressing - the attempt to establish general standards was pushed aside. Then came an invitation from ALA to speak on Performance Standards for Librarians: Are they coming or not? - Amazing from whence comes motivation! A perfect opportunity to get things moving again at Columbia on performance standards.

After discussing with the University Librarian the possibility of using a single department of the library in which to establish performance standards, we decided it would be better to do it on a small scale as sample information for this talk today and to make any decision regarding the process for larger segments of the staff after the sample. As indicated earlier, we have decided to continue training our managers in MBO.

A task force was appointed through consultation with the Heads of the two participating units. It was composed of the Head, Original Monograph Cataloging, and two catalogers from that department and the Head, Reference Department, Health Sciences Library and two reference librarians from that department and myself as chairman. We looked at the film on performance standards from the AMA management seminar, and after a brief discussion, the reference librarians and the catalogers went on their respective ways to write performance standards- a minimal amount of training because of the minimal length of time in which to accomplish the task. Training and understanding is crucial to the successful implementation of MBO and writing of performance standards.

As an aside, I would like to mention that Essex County College in Newark, N.J., spent about a year training a small staff of seven librarians in MBO. There is an explanation of their experience in the Canadian Library Journal, May-June, 1973, and immediately following the article, a bibliography on MBO.

In our task force of seven people, the managers had taken the seminar and thus had been exposed to the whole philosophy, but the non-managers had not, and I think, initially, the four non-managers felt negative about the whole idea of performance standards. The term STANDARDS especially bothered the non-managers, even though the film had impressed on them that these performance standards were to be set for developmental purposes and not for punishment, the feeling was that that really wasn't the way it was going to be and as a result, at the beginning, it was a real threat to their security.

Management experts say that it takes up to three years to establish good performance standards. We had worked for about fifteen hours - but what happened in those fifteen hours was that these people were communicating. We agreed upon some things, we disagreed upon others, but what we all ultimately agreed upon was that performance standards for librarians are definitely worthwhile, even though extremely difficult to write.

In the communication process, the managers found out the concerns of the employees; the employees found out that the managers had some of the same concerns that they did and were trying to do something about the problems; the expectations of both employees and managers were expressed; and evidence of problems in work flow and work assignment came to light. The members of the task force did feel that it was very important to set objectives for all units extremely dependent upon one another, e.g. Searching Unit and Cataloging Units. We realized how difficult it is to write measurable and meaningful performance objectives, especially in an area like reference - and yet the objectives exist in the minds of the head of the department as well as in the minds of the reference librarians - for themselves and in judging their peers. What we are attempting to do is to articulate together what those objectives are.

Now let me give some examples of some of the performance standards/objectives that we wrote:

1st version - Satisfactory bibliographic control is maintained over items awaiting cataloging; reasonable currency is achieved and established priorities are maintained.

What are SATISFACTORY bibliographical control and REASONABLE currency?

2nd version - Bibliographic control is maintained over items awaiting cataloging, holding the material no more than three days before sending it to Data Control, and established priorities are maintained.

Still not exact and totally measurable, but closer to it.

Another cataloging standard:
Necessary authority work and cross references are made and formulated according to the LC/AA/Columbia rules. NECESSARY authority work? In whose judgement?

Some of the performance objectives in the reference area in the Health Sciences Library were easier because we have terminal access to Data Bases and somehow it was easier in this area.

All data base monthly updates are initiated no later than one work day after the current data base becomes available.

BUT here's another one that's questionable in the reference area:

No reader complaints of a substantial nature are received. OVER HOW LONG A PERIOD OF TIME? AND WHAT IS SUBSTANTIAL? AND WHAT ABOUT READER'S COMPLIMENTS?

What happens initially is that you measure the things for which it is easiest to articulate measurement, but often they are not the most important things.

IT IS NOT EASY - BUT IT IS EXTREMELY USEFUL!

In our world of today that is changing so rapidly, libraries and librarians must change also if they are to continue fulfilling their roles. Alvin Toffler in his book entitled Future Shock notes the development of a number of changes, including the explosion of information, mobility of society and changing social attitudes. To adapt to these changes library management needs to also become more flexible.

In the bureaucratic library organization, the individual fits into a sharply defined slot. He fits into a vertical hierarchical structure, a chain of command, where organizational relationships are permanent. Reorganization takes place. Ad Hoc committees and task forces are formed, and the individual severs links with the old familiar, but now no longer existing structure, and assumes a relationship to the new one that supersedes it. The task forces are composed of all levels of personnel solving problems with fairly equal input. Relationships are turning over at a faster and faster rate. People no longer remain in a fixed position in this kind of organization, and this alters loyalties of people involved, shakes up lines of authority, and accelerates the rate at which individuals are forced to adapt to organizational change. What we see happening is that those who participate in the task forces and new structure are changing and developing and those who do not participate or who cannot deal with the rapid change and thus are still tied into the bureaucracy, have difficulty with the changes taking place and with the impact that other staff members are having on the organization. As acceleration continues, organizational redesign becomes a continuing function.[11]

Not surprisingly, we witness a decline in the old fashioned loyalty to the organization and its substructures and a rise in professional loyalty. This happened in other professions some time ago, and librarians are late in coming to it. Professional specialists, according to the management expert Bennis, seemingly derive their rewards from inward standards of excellence, from the intrinsic satisfaction of their task. In fact, they are committed to the task, not the job; to their standards, not their boss.

As the philosopher, Norbert Wiener says, "We have modified our environment so radically, that we must now modify ourselves to exist in this new environment".[10] The same goes for our institutions, including, of course, our libraries.

In summary, let's review the salient points of this presentation:

1. If you're going to be a manager, you jolly well better be a good manager and know what managing is all about. Study and learn what it means to be a good manager through reading, attending seminars and workshops, viewing films, talking with other managers, etc.
2. Communicate! In all directions!
3. Listen!
4. CARE - about people and their development
5. Give your managers full authority and hold them accountable for the results!

10. Peter, Laurence J. The Peter Prescription. New York, Bantam, 1973. p. 8.
11. Toffler, Alvin. Future Shock. New York, Random House, 1970.

6. Top administration should seek out management potential in the library and implement manager training for existing managers as well as those who show promise.

7. If MBO is to be implemented, the entire staff, or any staff to be involved must have good training in the philosophy and practice of writing objectives.

8. Performance objectives ultimately must be established on a one to one basis, although over-all objectives may be written by a group doing like tasks.

9. These individual performance objectives are for the development of the individual (and thus the library) and not for punishment of the individual.

10. We recognize that the articulating of performance objectives on an individual basis is difficult, but feel it is worthwhile.

LET'S MOVE WITH OR AHEAD OF THE CHANGING SOCIETY, NOT BE RUN OVER BY IT!

PERFORMANCE STANDARDS FOR LIBRARIANS: ARE THEY COMING OR NOT?

That's up to each of us to answer in our own library situations, but librarians are mission oriented people. MBO presents a means that is both current and in keeping with contemporary society to fulfill our mission. I think we must take advantage of the philosophy of Management by Objectives now. It really doesn't matter whether we call it performance standards, or performance objectives, or key results, as long as we're taking our managing seriously, managing systematically and not by instinct, and managing in order to accomplish our stated goals.

As Adam said to Eve when they were leaving the Garden of Eden: "My dear, we're living in a time of transition"[12] Funny thing, even after all these years, we're still living in a time of transition. Let's take advantage of it. I challenge you to read anything you can find, as good librarians, on MBO, performance appraisal, performance objectives, to discuss it with your administration and your staff and to dare to give MBO a try. Let's make "the biggest and most important management task of the century" a dynamic success in our libraries.

Thank you!

Joyce D. Veenstra
July 7, 1974

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12. Peter, op. cit. p. 20.